

## BOOK REVIEWS

WITNESSES TO THE WORD: NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES SINCE VATICAN II.  
By Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. New York: Paulist, 2012. Pp. xvii + 122. \$14.95.

In this slim volume Harrington sets out “to explain to a general audience what [he] regard[s] as the most important developments in New Testament studies over the past fifty years” (xv). The vast majority of New Testament scholars will concur: the six chapters summarize mainstream scholarly positions about major developments in our field, and they rehearse the most common points that we often find ourselves explaining to nonspecialists.

Although H.’s scholarly work is resolutely historical and ecumenical, his approach in this book is also very personal and “admittedly subjective” (98). It is also very Catholic. Its chronological framework of “the past fifty years” uses Vatican II as the marker of modern biblical studies. Consequently he draws both explicitly and implicitly on interpretive methods promoted by *Dei verbum* and, in a subtler but no less crucial way, on the revised stance toward Jews and Judaism encapsulated in Vatican II’s *Nostra aetate*. He also employs positively the great *et . . . et* (“both . . . and”) of the Catholic tradition throughout the volume. H. cites as exemplars scholars who may not always share the same page (e.g., Jaroslav Pelikan and Sandra Schneiders [6–7]). And throughout the book, he emphasizes both the Jewish and the Roman contexts of early Christianity, whereas some scholars incorrectly view these as an irreconcilable pair that must be kept separate for the purposes of analysis.

As the longtime editor of *New Testament Abstracts*, though, H. is not parochial but broadly versed in the whole field, both within and outside Catholic biblical studies. He manages to reflect consensus views on his six topics with which most scholars would agree. Each chapter covers advancements in the field: new methods for textual interpretation; the influence of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls on our understanding of early Judaism (an area of H.’s expertise); the findings of the so-called “Third Quest” for the historical Jesus; the study of the authorial agency and tendencies of the four evangelists; the new perspectives on Paul’s Jewish identity and immediate context; and most recently, scholars granting more than superficial attention to the Roman imperial forces that shaped the politics and culture of first-century Christian communities.

From within H.’s judicious summaries of recent scholarship, some distinctive features of his approach emerge. First and foremost he features more frequently and powerfully than many other scholars would the evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls as beneficial comparative material for the New Testament (16–29). While stopping short of identifying Jesus as an

Essene, H. proposes a possible link through John the Baptist, and he certainly finds compelling the parallels in sectarian apocalyptic language, themes, and communal organization. The circumstances of contemporary Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations also influence H.'s work, and his honesty in foregrounding these influences is commendable. The new perspectives on Paul have been inspired in part by "theological reflection on the tragic role of Christian theology and practice in the European Shoah, and the firm resolve expressed in Vatican II's *Nostra aetate* (1965) to rethink the church's relationship to the Jewish people in Pauline terms" (64–65). The conciliar document also shapes how H. deals with the "long and sorry history" of how Christians blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus, despite the fact that "Pilate had the principal legal responsibility" (41–43).

H. is so adept at presenting the scholarly consensus that the few occasions where he overstates it bear noting. One of these is his presentation of 1 Peter as paradigmatic of a "Gentile Christian" response to the Roman Empire (89–91). Many scholars would say that the implied author and audience of the letter are very difficult to locate on a Jewish-to-Gentile spectrum. The text's language of "aliens and exiles" can be read in multiple ways, and the letter's consistent appeals to typical Jewish markers of identity (exile, Passover, Babylon, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, etc.) can also be read as denotative of Jewish-Christian audiences in "the diaspora" (1:1)—converts from Hellenistic Judaism that feel doubly alienated from both non-Christian Jews and Gentiles (see, e.g., Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, vol. 2, *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1–2 Peter* [2008]). Another slight departure from consensus occurs in H.'s treatment of noncanonical texts from early Christianity. They are given very little space (62–63), despite their relatively large foothold in the scholarly discussion. Many scholars view the discoveries of texts at Nag Hammadi and elsewhere, especially the *Gospel of Thomas*, with as much zeal as H. views the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Aimed at a general audience, the book should find a welcoming reception there. But another audience will also find the book equally or even more attractive: scholars from theological disciplines outside NT studies. These hundred pages can help systematians, medievalists, and Hebrew Bible scholars get a better handle on recent NT scholarship.

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EL AMOR A LA VERDAD: VIDA Y OBRA DE MIGUEL SERVET. By Francisco Javier B. González Echeverría. Tudela: Gobierno de Navarra, 2011. Pp. 542. €20.

In this fascinating and detailed study of the 16th-century medical researcher, humanist, and theologian Miguel Servet, González Echeverría